

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVIST'S APPEAL HEARING ADJOURNED AGAIN

Political activist Fadhel Abbas has had his appeal hearing adjourned for a third time, to 25 April, because a prosecution witness has failed to attend. He is a prisoner of conscience.

Fadhel Abbas Mahdi Mohamed (m), former Secretary General of opposition political party The Unitary National Democratic Assemblage (al-Wahdawi party) was present in the High Court of Appeals in the capital, Manama, on 3 March, for a hearing of his appeal against his five-year prison sentence. The prosecution witness again failed to attend, and the hearing was adjourned to 25 April.

This is the third time his appeal hearing has been postponed because the prosecution witness has failed to attend. This happened in December 2015 and in January 2016. Amnesty International believes Fadhel Abbas, aged 44, has been sentenced solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression and has not used or advocated violence. He is still held at Jaw prison, south of Manama.

Fadhel Abbas was sentenced to five years in prison on 28 June 2015 for "spreading false information that could damage military operations of Bahrain and its allies and calling for resistance" after the political party he headed said that the Saudi Arabia-led airstrikes in Yemen were a violation of international law.

Article 133 of the Bahraini Penal Code punishes with up to 10 years in prison anyone who "deliberately announces in wartime false or malicious news, statements or rumours or mounts adverse publicity campaigns, so as to cause damage to military preparations for defending the State of Bahrain or military operations of the Armed Forces, to cause people to panic or to weaken the nation's perseverance".

Please write immediately in English, Arabic or your own language:

- Calling on the Bahraini authorities to release Fadhel Abbas immediately and unconditionally and quash his conviction as he is a prisoner of conscience, held solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression;
- Urging them to repeal laws that criminalize the peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression, in line with Bahrain's obligations under Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 22 APRIL 2016 TO:

King

Shaikh Hamad bin 'Issa Al Khalifa

Office of His Majesty the King

P.O. Box 555

Rifa'a Palace, al-Manama

Bahrain

Fax: +973 1766 4587

Salutation: Your Majesty

Ministry of Interior

Shaikh Rashid bin 'Abdullah Al Khalifa

P.O. Box 13, al-Manama, Bahrain

Fax: +973 1723 2661

Email: (via website)

www.interior.gov.bh/contact_en.aspx

Twitter: @moi_Bahrain

Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs

Shaikh Khaled bin Ali bin Abdullah Al Khalifa

Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs

P. O. Box 450, al-Manama, Bahrain

Fax: +973 1753 1284

Twitter: @Khaled_Bin_Ali

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

His Excellency Shaikh Fawaz bin Mohammed Al Khalifa, Embassy of the Kingdom of Bahrain, 30 Belgrave Square, London, SW1X 8QB, Tel: 0207 201 9170, Fax 020 7201 9183, Email: information@bahrainembassy.co.uk or through the online contact form at <http://www.bahrainembassy.co.uk/> Salutation: Your Excellency

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 142/15. Further information:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde11/1962/2015/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Fadhel Abbas was arrested on 26 March 2015, after the political party he heads said the Saudi Arabia-led airstrikes in Yemen were a violation of international law. The day he was arrested the Ministry of Interior announced Bahrain's support for the Saudi Arabia-led coalition in Yemen and issued a statement warning that the government would take steps against any "attempt to exploit the situation through division or sedition, or issuance of statements against the approach Bahrain has taken". He has been in prison since then.

His trial before the High Criminal Court in Manama started on 27 April and he pleaded not guilty during the first session. He was sentenced on 28 June to five years in prison for "spreading false information that could damage military operations of Bahrain and its allies and calling for resistance". Fadhel Abbas was not brought to his first appeal hearing, which took place on 11 October 2015.

Fadhel Abbas was convicted less than two weeks after another prominent opposition leader, Sheikh 'Ali Salman, the Secretary General of the al-Wefaq National Islamic Society, was sentenced by the High Criminal Court, after an unfair trial, to four years in prison for "public incitement to loathing and contempt of a sect of people which will result in disrupting public order", "publicly insulting the Interior Ministry" and "publicly inciting others to disobey the law". These charges related to statements he had made in speeches in 2012 and 2014, including his speech at the party's General Assembly meeting on 26 December when he referred to the refusal of the opposition in Bahrain to follow the approach of the Syrian opposition and turn the country into a military battleground. He also highlighted the need for equality for all Bahrainis, including the ruling family.

These and other cases of prisoners of conscience demonstrate the Bahraini authorities' intolerance of criticism of their policies, ruling figures or the practices of their security forces.

Name: Fadhel Abbas Mahdi Mohamed

Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 142/15 Index: MDE 11/3622/2016 Issue Date: 11 March 2016